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PAPERS FROM "THE SPECTATOR" ON A LADY'S LIBRARY

Thursday, April 12, 1711.

—Non illa colo calathisque Minervae
Foemineas assuetis manus—

Virg. Aen. vii. 805.

Unbred to spinning, in the loom unskill'd.

Dryden.

Some months ago, my friend Sir Roger, being in the country, inclosed a letter to me, directed to a certain lady whom I shall here call by the name of Leonora, and, as it contained matters of consequence, desired me to deliver it to her with my own hand. Accordingly I waited upon her ladyship pretty early in the morning, and was desired by her woman to walk into her lady's library, till such time as she was in a readiness to receive me. The very sound of a lady's library gave me a great curiosity to see it; and as it was some time before the lady came to me, I had an opportunity of turning over a great many of her books, which were ranged together in a very beautiful order. At the end of the folios (which were finely bound and gilt) were great jars of china placed one above another in a very noble piece of architecture. The quartos were separated from the octavos by a pile of smaller vessels, which rose in a delightful pyramid. The octavos were bounded by tea-dishes of all shapes, colours and sizes, which were so disposed on a wooden frame, that they looked like one continued pillar indented with the finest strokes of sculpture, and stained with the greatest variety of dyes. That part

of the library which was designed for the reception of plays and pamphlets, and other loose papers, was inclosed in a kind of square, consisting of one of the prettiest grotesque works that ever I saw, and made up of scarabouches, lions, monkeys, mandarines, trees, shells, and a thousand other odd figures in china ware. In the midst of the room was a little japan table, with a quire of gilt paper upon it, and on the paper a silver snuff-box made in the shape of a little book. I found there were several other counterfeit books upon the upper shelves, which were carved in wood, and served only to fill up the number, like fagots in the muster of a regiment. I was wonderfully pleased with such a mixt kind of furniture, as seemed very suitable both to the lady and the scholar, and did not know at first whether I should fancy myself in a grotto, or in a library.

Upon my looking into the books, I found there were some few which the lady had bought for her own use, but that most of them had been got together, either because she had heard them praised, or because she had seen the authors of them. Among several that I examined, I very well remember these that follow:

Ogleby's Virgil,

Dryden's Juvenal.

Cassandra.

Cleopatra.

Astraea.

Sir Isaac Newton's Works.

The Grand Cyrus; with a pin stuck
in one of the middle leaves.

Pembroke's Arcadia.

Locke on Human Understanding;
with a paper of patches in it.

A Spelling Book.

A Dictionary for the explanation of
hard words.

Sherlock upon Death.

The Fifteen Comforts of Matrimony.

Sir William Temple's Essays.

Father Malebranche's Search after
Truth, translated into English.

A book of Novels.

The Academy of Compliments.

Culpepper's Midwifery.

The Ladies Calling.

Tales in Verse by Mr. Durfey; bound
in red leather, gilt on the back and
doubled down in several places.

All the Classic Authors in Wood.

A Set of Elzevirs by the same Hand.

Clelia: which opened of itself in the
place that describes two lovers in a
bower.

Baker's Chronicle.

Advice to a Daughter.

The New Atalantis, with a Key to it.

Mr. Steele's Christian Hero.

A Prayer-book: with a bottle of
Hungary-Water by the side of it.

Dr. Sacheverell's Speech.

Fielding's Trial.

Seneca's Morals.

Taylor's Holy Living and Dying.

La Ferte's Instructions for Country
Dances.

I was taking a catalogue in my
pocket-book of these, and several other
authors, when Leonora entered, and
upon my presenting her with a letter
from the knight, told me, with an un-
speakable grace, that she hoped Sir

Roger was in good health; I answered
Yes, for I hate long speeches, and after
a bow or two retired.

Leonora was formerly a celebrated
beauty, and is still a very lovely woman.
She has been a widow for two or three
years, and being unfortunate in her
first marriage, has taken a resolution
never to venture upon a second. She
has no children to take care of, and
leaves the management of her estate
to my good friend Sir Roger. But as
the mind naturally sinks into a kind
of lethargy, and falls asleep, that is not
agitated by some favourite pleasures
and pursuits, Leonora has turned all
the passions of her sex into a love of
books and retirement. She converses
chiefly with men (as she has often said
herself), but it is only in their writings;
and admits of very few male visitants,
except my friend Sir Roger, whom she
hears with great pleasure, and without
scandal. As her reading has lain very
much among romances, it has given
her a very particular turn of thinking,
and discovers itself even in her house,
her gardens and her furniture. Sir
Roger has entertained me an hour to-
gether with a description of her coun-
try seat, which is situated in a kind of
wilderness, about an hundred miles
distant from London, and looks like
a little enchanted palace. The rocks
about her are shaped into artificial
grottos covered with woodbines and
jessamines. The woods are cut into
shady walks, twisted into bowers, and
filled with cages of turtles. The springs
are made to run among pebbles, and
by that means taught to murmur very
agreeably. They are likewise collected
into a beautiful lake that is inhabited
by a couple of swans, and empties it-

self by a little rivulet, which runs through a green meadow, and is known in the family by the name of The Purling Stream. The knight likewise tells me, that this lady preserves her game better than any of the gentlemen in the country, not (says Sir Roger) that she sets so great a value upon her partridges and pheasants, as upon her larks and nightingales. For she says that every bird that is killed in her ground, will spoil a consort, and she shall certainly miss him next year.

When I think how oddly this lady is improved by learning, I look upon her with a mixture of admiration and pity. Amidst these innocent entertainments which she has formed to herself, how much more valuable does she appear than those of her sex, who

employ themselves in diversions that are less reasonable, though more in fashion? What improvements would a woman have made, who is so susceptible of impressions from what she reads, had she been guided to such books as have a tendency to enlighten the understanding and rectify the passions, as well as to those which are of little more use than to divert the imagination?

But the manner of a lady's employing herself usefully in reading shall be the subject of another paper, in which I design to recommend such particular books as may be proper for the improvement of the sex. And as this is a subject of a very nice nature, I shall desire my correspondents to give me their thoughts upon it.

Friday, June 15, 1711.

—Convivæ propè dissentire videntur,
Poscentes vario multùm diversa palato;
Quid Dem? Quid non dem?

Hor. 2 Ep. ii. 61.

Imitated.

—What would you have me do,
When out of twenty I can please not two?—
One likes the pheasant's wing, and one the leg;
The vulgar boil, the learned roast an egg;
Hard task to hit the palate of such guests.

Pope.

Looking over the late packets of letters which have been sent to me, I found the following one:

'Mr. Spectator,

'Your paper is part of my tea-equipage; and my servant knows my humour so well, that calling for my breakfast this morning (it being past my usual hour), she answered, the Spectator was not yet come in; but that the tea-kettle boiled, and she expected it every moment. Having thus in part signified to you the esteem and veneration which I have for you, I must put you

in mind of the catalogue of books which you have promised to recommend to our sex; for I have deferred furnishing my closet with authors, till I receive your advice in this particular, being your daily disciple and humble servant.

'Leonora'

In answer to my fair disciple, whom I am very proud of, I must acquaint her and the rest of my readers, that since I have called out for help in my catalogue of a lady's library, I have received many letters upon that head, some of which I shall give an account of.

In the first class, I shall take notice of those which come to me from eminent booksellers, who every one of them mention with respect the authors they have printed, and consequently have an eye to their own advantage more than to that of the ladies. One tells me, that he thinks it absolutely

necessary for woman to have true notions of right and equity, and that therefore they cannot peruse a better book than Dalton's Country Justice. Another thinks they cannot be without The Complete Jockey. A third, observing the curiosity and desire of prying into secrets, which he tells me is natural to the fair sex, is of the opinion this female inclination, if well directed might turn very much to their advantage, and therefore recommends to me Mr. Mede upon the Revelations. A fourth lays it down as unquestioned truth, that a lady cannot be thoroughly accomplished who has not read the secret Traties and Negociations of the Marshal d'Estrades. Mr. Jacob Tonson junior, is of the opinion, that Bayle's Dictionary might be of very great use to the ladies, in order to make them general scholars. Another, whose name I have forgotten, thinks it highly proper that every woman with child should read Mr. Wall's History of Infant Baptism; as another is very importunate with me to recommend to all my female readers The Finishing Stroke; being a Vindication of the Patriarchal Scheme, &c.

In the second class, I shall mention books which are recommended by husbands, if I may believe the writers of them. Whether or no they are real husbands or personated ones, I cannot tell, but the books they recommend are as follows:—A Paraphrase on the History of Susanna. Rules to Keep Lent. The Christmas Overthrow Prevented. A Dissuasive from the Playhouse. The Virtues of Camphire, with Directions to make Camphire Tea. The Pleasures of a Country Life. The Government of the Tongue. A letter dated

from Cheapside desires me that I would advise all young wives to make themselves mistresses of Wingate's Arithmetic, and concludes with a Postscript that he hopes I will not forget The Countess of Kent's Receipts.

I may reckon these ladies themselves as a third class among these my correspondents and privy-counsellors. In a letter from one of them, I am advised to place Pharamond at the head of my catalogue, and, if I think proper, to give the second place to Cassandra. Coquetilla begs me not to think of nailing women upon their knees with manuals of devotion, nor of scorching their faces with books of housewifery. Florella desires to know if there are any books written against prudes, and entreats me, if there are, to give them a place in my library. Plays of all sorts have their several advocates: All for Love is mentioned in about fifteen letters; Sophonisba, or Hannibal's Overthrow, in a dozen; The Innocent Adultery is likewise highly approved of; Mithridates, King of Pontus has many friends; Alexander the Great and Aurenzebe have the same number of voices; but Theodosius, or the Force of Love, carries it from all the rest.

I should, in the last place, mention such books as have been proposed by men of learning, and those who appear competent judges of this matter; and must here take occasion to thank A. B. whoever it is that conceals himself under those two letters, for his advice upon this subject. But as I find the work I have undertaken to be very difficult, I shall defer the executing of it till I am farther acquainted with the thoughts of my judicious contemporaries, and have time to examine the

several books they offer to me ; being resolved, in an affair of this moment, to proceed with the greatest caution.

In the meanwhile, as I have taken the ladies under my particular care, I shall make it my business to find out in the best authors, ancient and modern, such passages as may be for their use, and endeavour to accomodate them as well as I can to their taste; not questioning but the valuable part of the sex will easily pardon me, if from time to time I laugh at those little vanities and follies which appear in the behaviour of some of them, and which are more proper for ridicule than a serious censure. Most books being calculated for male readers, and generally written with an eye to men of learning, makes a work of this nature the more necessary; besides, I am the more encouraged, because I flatter myself that I see the sex daily improving by these my speculations. My fair readers are already deeper scholars than the beaux. I could name some of them who talk much better than several gentlemen

that make a figure at Will's; and as I frequently receive letters from the fine ladies and pretty fellows, I cannot but observe that the former are superior to the others, not only in the sense, but in the spelling. This cannot but have a good effect upon the female world, and keep them from being charmed by those empty coxcombs that have hitherto been admired among the women, though laughed at among the men.

I am credibly informed that Tom Tattle passes for an impertinent fellow, that Will Trippet begins to be smoked, and that Frank Smoothly himself is within a month of a coxcomb, in case I think fit to continue this paper. For my part, as it is my business in some measure to detect such as would lead astray weak minds by their false pretences to wit and judgement, humour and gallantry, I shall not fail to lend the best lights I am able to the Fair Sex for the continuation of these their discoveries.